DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 456 323 CE 082 304

AUTHOR Smith, Peter J.; Wakefield, Lyn; Robertson, Ian
TITLE Testing the Feasibility of Strategies To Enhance Flexible Delivery in the Workplace.
PUB DATE 2001-03-00
NOTE 7p.; In: Research to Reality: Putting VET Research To Work. Proceedings of the Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association (AVETRA) Conference (4th, Adelaide, Australia, March 28-30, 2001); see CE 082 232. Research project supported by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).
AVAILABLE FROM For full text: http://www.avetra.org.au/PAPERS%202001/P%20Smith.pdf.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitude Change; *Cognitive Style; *Delivery Systems; Educational Change; Employee Attitudes; Flexible Progression; Independent Study; *Learning Strategies; Lifelong Learning; *On the Job Training; Online Systems; Organizational Change; Postsecondary Education; *Student Attitudes; Student Characteristics; Student Needs; Study Skills; *Teaching Methods; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Australia

ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown that the majority of the characteristics of vocational education and training (VET) learners in Australia typically lie in the quadrant of "dependent" and "non-verbal," and preferred to learn from hands-on direct experience rather than through reading or listening. Workplace educational delivery systems for these learners, however, tend to fall into the quadrant of "verbal" and "independent/self-directed" learning. The results from this research indicate that challenges confront the successful implementation of flexible delivery for VET learners in the workplace. Therefore, a model should be developed to include intervention strategies to assist VET learners to develop the skills needed for effective self-directed, and ultimately, lifelong, learning and to include the development of enterprise-based strategies to assist enterprises to develop the policies, processes, and structures to recognize and support flexible learning within workplaces. Additional research is planned to identify methods of implementing these strategies in the workplace. (Contains 14 references.) (KC)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 456 323

Testing the feasibility of strategies to enhance flexible delivery in the workplace

Peter J Smith

Deakin University, Victoria

Lyn Wakefield

Gordon Institute of TAFE, Victoria

Ian Robertson

Box Hill Institute of TAFE, Victoria

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

K. Whittingham

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Smith (2000a, 2000b) has published research on the learning preferences and strategies of VET learners, and the support provided to them in the workplace. That research has shown that, for flexible delivery in the workplace to be effective, strategies need to be developed to enhance the preparedness both of learners and workplaces to engage in successful flexible delivery. From that earlier research, Smith (2000c) has generated a model of flexible delivery, together with a broad set of possible strategies to develop the necessary preparedness.

This paper describes a current research project, supported by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), and designed to test the feasibility of those strategies for implementation in operating workplaces. The paper will also report on results to date.

At the AVETRA Conference in 2000, Smith (2000b) presented a paper representing research undertaken on the preparedness of VET learners and their workplaces for flexible delivery. That paper reviewed literature (Boote 1998; Evans 2000; Kember 1995) observing that successful open learning or resource-based flexible delivery requires learners to be self-directed. Based on writers such as Candy (1991) and Crombie (1995), Boote had raised the question of whether VET learners are prepared for flexible delivery and well supported through it. Subsequent empirical large sample research by Warner et al (1998), and Smith (2000a, 2000b) has borne out Boote's suggestions, and shown that VET learners are not typically well prepared or equipped for successful engagement in self-directed learning.

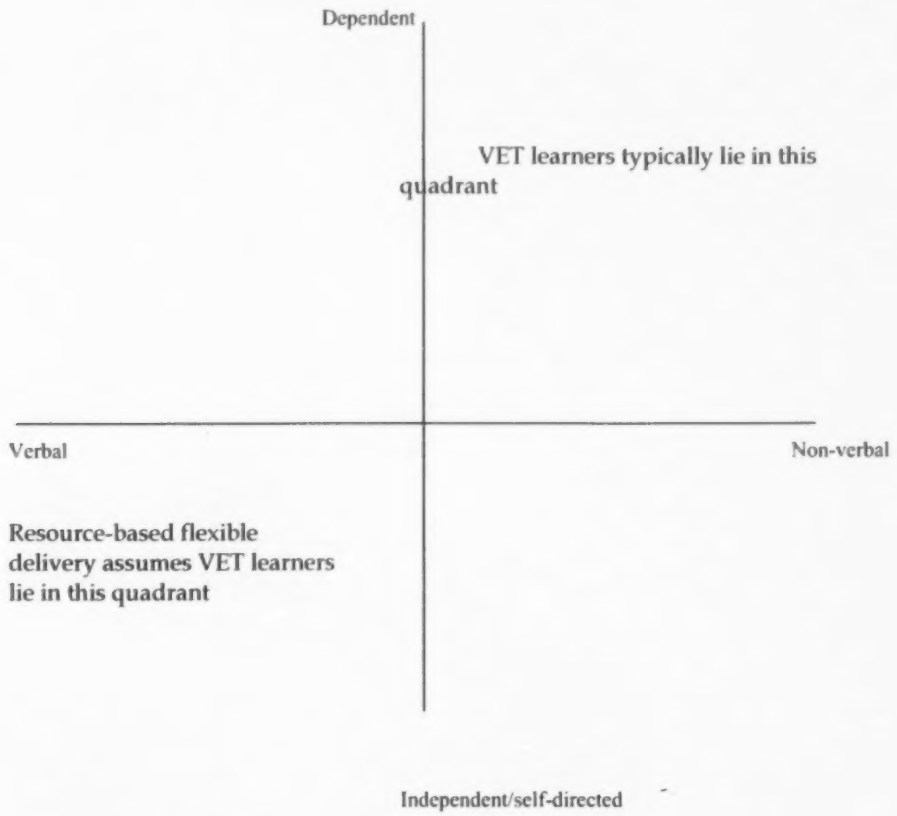
The Warner et al (1998) paper collected data from a cross section of VET learners in three states, using the Gugliemino and Gugliemino (1991) *Learning Preference Assessment*, and indicated that a high majority of VET students yielded low scores on the self-directed learning scale. Their research also showed a preference among VET students for face-to-face delivery and print-based packaged learning materials over other forms, and preferred work projects as 'guided-experiential learning experience' (p 8).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CE 082 304

Smith's (2000a) research used a large sample of VET learners from one state in an empirical study using the *Canfield Learning Styles Inventory* (Canfield 1980). That research indicated that, although there was variation among different groups of VET learners, they were largely characterised by a preference for dependent learning contexts where structure was provided, instructors provided guidance, and where learning was a social activity undertaken in a context of good peer and instructor relationships. Self-directed learning was a low preference. The research also showed that VET learners preferred to learn from hands-on direct experience rather than through reading or listening. Smith (2000c) has provided the two-dimensional Figure 1 to show the tension between VET learner preferences and the requirements of flexible delivery.

Figure 1: Two dimensional representation of factors describing VET learner preferences



Smith's research also involved detailed interviews with a small sample of VET learners to establish the metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective learning

strategies they used while engaged with learning through flexible delivery in the workplace. That research indicated that VET learners typically used those strategies associated with learning and practising material structured and provided for them by their instructor, and by the course material. They did not typically use learning strategies, nor access other learning materials, that extended their knowledge beyond that provided by the program structure. They did not form their own structures through their learning.

Finally, Smith (2000b, 2000c) has reported on further research focused on the support provided for flexible learners in their workplaces. Similarly to other workplace research (eg Brooker and Butler 1997; Calder and McCollum 1998; Harris et al 1998), Smith's research indicated that workplaces had not typically developed the training policies and structures necessary for workplace learning support. Learners characteristically had little workplace guidance, sometimes experienced grudging attention to their learning needs, and experienced confusion between their roles as learners and as workers. Additionally, as also observed in Britain by Calder and McCollum (1998), engaging with self-paced learning materials in the workforce was sometimes seen as 'time out', and not as legitimate an activity as attending instructor-led training courses.

Clearly, the results from these three research directions indicate that some considerable challenges confront the successful implementation of flexible delivery for VET learners in their workplace. The research has been placed together in a framework to develop a model for effective flexible delivery. That model has two major components:

- The development of intervention strategies to assist VET learners to develop the skills needed for effective self-directed, and ultimately, lifelong learning; and

- The development of enterprise-based strategies to assist enterprises to develop the policies, processes and structures to recognise and support flexible learning within workplaces.

On the basis of that research Smith (2000b) provided a model for developing preparedness for flexible delivery in the workplace. That model was based on the need to develop both learners and their workplaces. The model was provided in summarised form in the AVETRA 2000 conference presentation (Smith 2000b). The detailed foci of the model were as follows.

Learner preparedness

- preparedness for self-directed learning in an environment of less instructor guidance
- preparedness for development of skills and conceptual knowledge through a range of learning strategies and materials
- preparedness to structure own learning within a community of practice.

Workplace preparedness

- development of clear training policies
- development of training structures
- development of trainer skills to support:
    - self-directed learning;
    - acquisition of skills and concepts; and
    - participation in a community of practice.

Within each of these foci, a number of specific strategies were identified to enable implementation of each of the developmental areas. These strategies are provided in detail in Smith (2000c).

The current research in progress

Following the identification of those strategies through research and literature review, there is a need for the research to move towards its expected connection with practice. In short, we need to test the feasibility of the identified strategies for their implementation in workplaces. The new project, undertaken between the three authors, from a university and two TAFE institutes, is designed to test that feasibility in a number of different workplaces and to identify possible implementation processes for each of the strategies found to be feasible. Further, the research is designed to identify whether some strategies may be feasible in some workplaces but not others; as well as identifying strategies being used in workplaces but not in the original Smith (2000c) set. NCVER has supported this research through a 2000 Major Round Grant to the Research Institute for Professional and Vocational Education and Training, located at Deakin University and the Gordon Institute of TAFE.

The precise research questions to be addressed in the projects are:

- Which of the set of learner development strategies identified in research to date can be feasibly implemented in operating workplaces?

- Which of the set of workplace support strategies identified in research to date can be feasibly implemented in operating workplaces?

- Can features of enterprises and their cultures be linked to the feasible implementation of precise strategies?

- What strategies identified through workplace practices can be added to the strategies identified by research?

- How can the learner development and workplace support strategies be effectively implemented in workplaces?

Data gathering is designed to take three forms. First, there is a need to update the current literature review. Second, data will be collected from enterprises through a semi-structured interview format, with individual management personnel in each enterprise identified as having a responsibility for training and training management. Those interviews will be aimed at identifying the feasible strategies for

implementation. Third, a focus group methodology will be used in each enterprise, to gather data on the possible implementation processes that may attend the application within that enterprise of each strategy identified by that enterprise as feasible. Enterprises have been identified and data collection for this research will have commenced by the time AVETRA meets in 2001. The collection of enterprises comprises a mix of industry sectors, enterprise sizes, and regional and metropolitan areas. We are not able to identify the enterprises in this paper.

Training and training management personnel within each identified enterprise will be targeted for interview. Front line management and supervisory staff will also be targeted for the focus group component.

It is expected that this research will be completed within months of the AVETRA 2001 conference, such that publications and conference papers will begin to flow in the second half of 2001.

References

Boote J (1998) Learning to learn in vocational education and training: are students and teachers ready for it? Australian and New Zealand Journal of Vocational Education Research, vol 6, pp 59-86.

Brooker R and Butler J (1997) The learning context within the workplace: as perceived by apprentices and their workplace trainers. Journal of Vocational Education and Training, vol 49, pp 487-510.

Calder J and McCollum A (1998) Open and flexible learning in vocational education and training. London: Kogan Page.

Candy P C (1991) Self-direction for lifelong learning. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Canfield A (1980) The Canfield Learning Styles Inventory. Humanics Media/Ann Arbor.

Crombie A (1995) Cinderella – four years on. Paper presented to the Adult Learners Week Conference, Adult and Community Education, New South Wales.

Evans T (2000) Flexible delivery and flexible learning: developing flexible learners? In V Jakupec and J Garrick (eds) Flexible learning, human resource and organisational development. London: Routledge, pp 211-224.

Guglielmino L M and Guglielmino P J (1991) The learning preference assessment. USA: Organisation Design and Development.

Harris R, Willis P, Simons M and Underwood F (1998) Learning the job. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

Kember D (1995) Open learning courses for adults: a model of student progress. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Educational Technology Publications.

Smith P J (2000a) Preparedness for flexible delivery among vocational students. Distance Education, vol 21, pp 29-48.

Smith P J (2000b) Preparing learners and their workplaces in the effective use of flexible delivery for workforce training. Paper presented to the third annual conference of the Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association, Canberra, March.

Smith P J (2000c) Preparing for flexible delivery in industry: learners and their workplaces. Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria.

Warner D, Christie G and Choy S (1998) The readiness of the VET sector for flexible delivery including online learning. Brisbane: Australian National Training Authority.

Contact details

Peter Smith
Lecturer - Professional Education and Training
School of Social and Cultural Studies
Geelong Campus
Deakin University
Ph: +61 3 5227 1452
Email: pjbs@deakin.edu.au